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SUBJECT: FOLLOW THE ROADS TO FIND THE PROBLEMS IN EDO STATE

11. Summary: Conflictual politics and benighted leadership in local and state governments have contributed to miserable conditions for the residents in Edo State, best characterized by the overloaded, cratered roads of this trade-oriented State. Governor Lucky Igbinedion, lacking both vision and verve to get things done and further enfeebled by intra-party struggles, has been unable to improve his State during two terms in office. While the People's Democratic Party (PDP) remains the most powerful in the State, brewing internecine frictions could make the PDP vulnerable in the 2007 elections. The poor performance and internal squabbles within the PDP provide an aperture for a populist candidate to make some headway. Former Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) President Adams Oshiomhole hopes to fill the bill and seize the Edo Governorship come 2007. End summary.

Bad Condition of Edo's Roads . . .

12. On a late September visit to Benin City, Poloff experienced the dismal state of the roads of Edo State. The State's official sobriquet is the "Heartbeat of Nigeria" because its geographic position makes it a trading crossroads--significant trade pulsates through the state's major arteries to Lagos, Port Harcourt, and other parts of Nigeria. Unfortunately, crater-sized potholes have turned a busy highway into a moonscape. At three stretches in the road, the eastbound lanes proved impassable, forcing traffic to shift to westbound lanes. The resultant congestion and disorder brought traffic to a near standstill. Only impromptu directing by Motorized Police managed to get stalled traffic moving again. Numerous cars, buses, and trucks had broken down and were abandoned alongside the highway. Poloff struggled through a bone-rattling seven hour drive that should have lasted only four hours.

. . . Reflects Governor's Weakness

13. Journalist Michael Otunba, Political Editor for the Independent Television News and Chair of the Edo State Nigeria Union of Journalists, told Poloff that Edo's Roads are a product of the weakness of two-term Edo State Governor Lucky Igbinedion. The disrepair of the roads reflects the overall condition of the State. Igbinedion, son of Gabriel Igbinedion, one of the State's wealthiest men and an important traditional ruler, became governor as a result of a 1999 alliance between close presidential advisor and PDP official Anthony Anenih, a citizen of Edo, and the elder Igbinedion, Otunba stated.

14. However, that accord proved to be mortal. The

Anenih-Igbinedion alliance dissolved ignobly and very publicly after Igbinedion's 2003 re-election, as disputes over control of state appointees and Igbinedion's successor proved irreconcilable. Conditions in Edo State have suffered as Igbinedion refused to fix the main thoroughfares in Benin City, claiming they are federal roads outside of his purview.

However, the Governor has spent state funds on soccer fields and other projects most Edo citizens would deem frivolous. Not wanting to do anything that would benefit Igbinedion politically, Anenih held tight the federal public works purse strings so that no funds would be used to fix these roads.

15. Igbinedion has managed to move the State bureaucracy to fix some state roads but crucial thoroughfares remain in tatters. For example, Otunba characterized the main road from center city to the University of Benin a "disaster". The trip through the main market area of Benin City is as much an obstacle course as a road.

16. Even on those roads for which the Governor has managed to issue contracts, the work is often not completed or done poorly, Otunba added.

Flight of Supporters to AC Further Weakens Governor

17. Igbenedion was twice elected on the PDP ticket, but PDP infighting has weakened Igbinedion's control over the party mechanism considerably, Otunba said. As the Anenih-Igbinedion alliance faltered and control of the PDP apparatus seemed to fall into Anenih's hands due to his closeness to President Obasanjo, many of Igbenedion's supporters defected to the Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD) and then its successor, the Action Congress (AC), while

LAGOS 00001320 002 OF 002

Igbinedion has remained in the PDP. Speculation is rampant that Igbinedion might leave the PDP as well.

18. Igbinedion is finishing his second term, and is constitutionally barred from a third term. He has not declared himself a candidate for president, said Otunba. He has tried to position himself as a Vice-Presidential candidate and has the strong backing of close friend and political big brother, Delta State Governor James Ibori. Because of his poor record, his lobbying for the Vice-Presidential slot has not gotten much traction.

Some Services Have Improved, but Problems Remain

19. Igbinedion has been able to deliver some improvements in services that affect people's lives, said Otunba. One and a half years ago crime in Benin City was termed "terrible and dangerous" after 6:00 pm, as gangs roamed the streets targeting cell phones in particular. It was unsafe to take motorcycle taxis and there were few taxicabs. However, Igbinedion began to work on the crime problem and the city is now much safer, Otunba conceded.

110. Other sectors also suffer from problems that Igbinedion has been unable to fix. The Benin City Hospital, which is over a hundred years old, suffers frequent blackouts. Although the hospital has a generator, Otunba told Poloff that the hospital's wiring is so old that it cannot handle the electricity the generator creates.

Governor Has No Clear Successor

111. Despite the intra-party infighting, the PDP apparatus in Edo State continues to make it the strongest party. There are no other parties beside the PDP that have particularly

strong positions within the state, Otunba stated. The still-powerful Anenih has made Odion Ugbesia the PDP's gubernatorial favorite, but Anenih distanced himself from the presidential third-term bid and thus has lost some favor with Obasanjo. The loss of favor also means a diminution of clout. Anenih's candidate will not automatically win the Party nomination. Sensing that Anenih's stock has dropped, the Igbinedions are feeling a bit more confident in battling Anenih for control of the PDP.

¶12. Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) President Adams Oshiomhole has declared his candidacy for the governorship under a small opposition party, the Labour Party. Although popular, Oshiomhole has an uphill battle. Without the benefit of a major party with a strong organizational structure, he will be hard pressed to carry the state against candidates fielded by the PDP, Otunba remarked.

¶13. Comment: Political infighting in Igbinedion's second term has contributed to the dereliction of Edo State. Although not solely the fault of Igbinedion, as Governor he must shoulder the brunt of responsibility. While Tony Anenih remains a power in the State, his recent estrangement from Obasanjo will affect his preferred candidate Ugbesia. The PDP gubernatorial nomination is shaping up to be a tug-of-war. Meanwhile, the opposition remains a jumble. It remains to be seen whether Oshiomhole can generate enough popular enthusiasm to overcome his lack of political organizational strength. End comment.

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